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Understanding Children Through a Welcoming Lens

Helping Faith Communities Create Meaningful Children's Sermons for Every Child

Molly Stubbs, LPC | Executive Director, Birth to Five
Home and Community Based Services

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Agenda

01 Understanding Children

02 Language Development

03 Cognitive Development

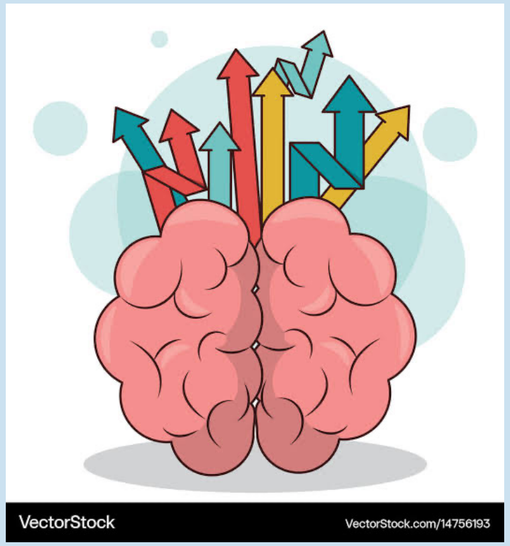
04 Neurodiversity and Inclusion

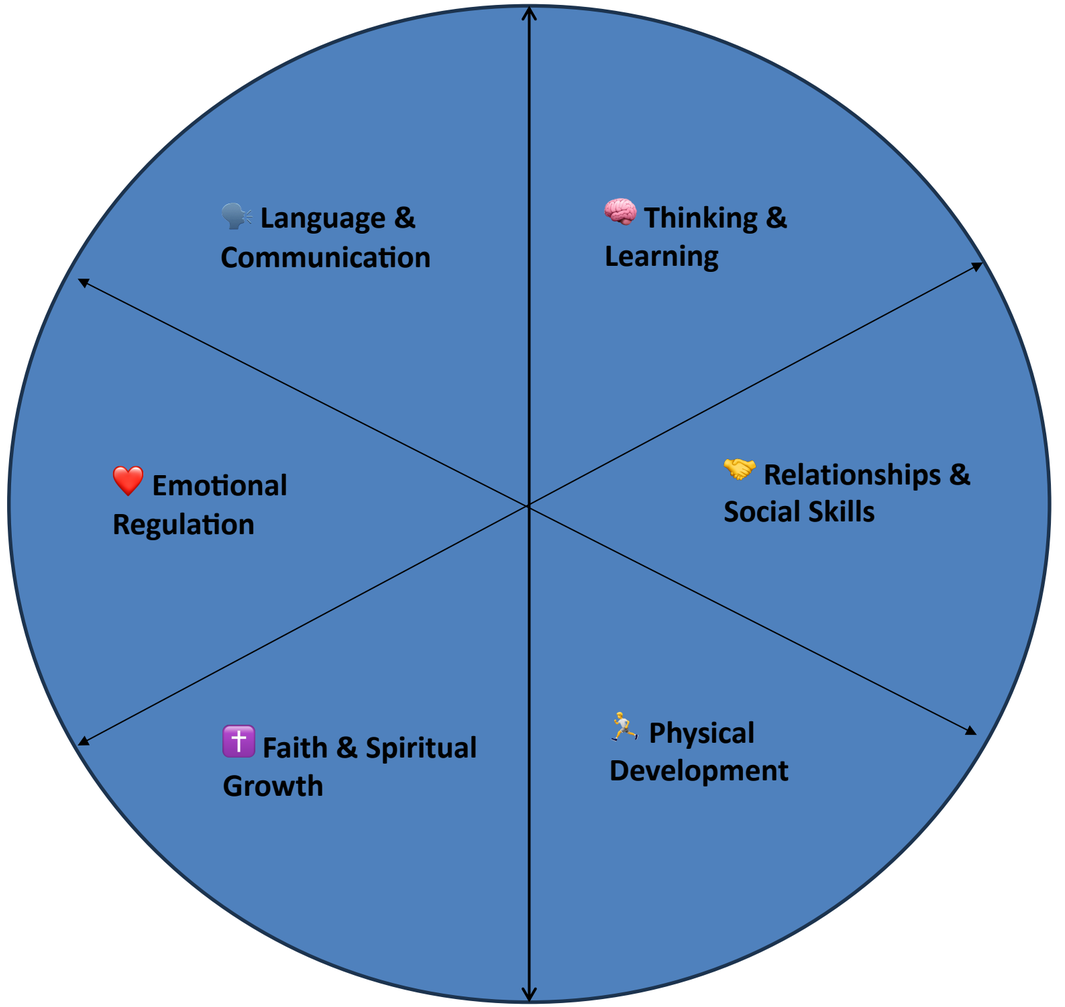


Understanding Children

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Children's Development is RAPID





Development Isn’t a Straight Line

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Children develop on different timelines, but all children deserve belonging.





Language Development

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Similar message, different words.

Age	What Works Best
3-5	Simple words, concrete examples
6-8	Storytelling, predicting outcomes
9-12	Metaphors, symbolism, discussion

Jesus loves me!



Jesus makes us kinder and more loving.



Jesus transforms our hearts.



Language Examples

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Changing our message to impact its delivery.

Complex Church Language	Child-Friendly Language
Salvation	God helping us
Redemption	Making things right
Grace	Being loved, even when we make mistakes
Forgiveness	Letting go of hurt
Faith	Trusting God

… wash away your sins ….





Thought Development

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Step One – Ages 3-7
Concrete Thinking
Touch, See, Do

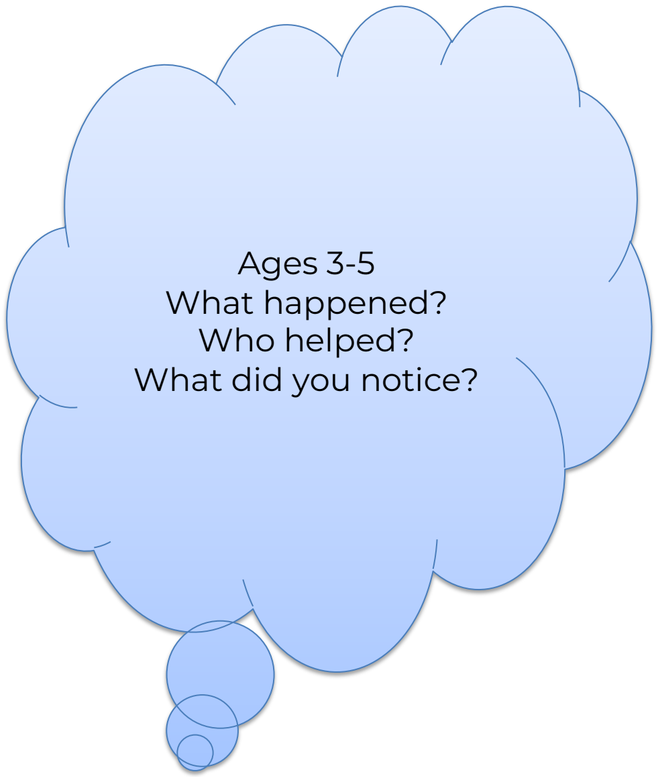
Step Two – Ages 7-11
Bridge Stage
Examples and stories help with understanding and applying to real life

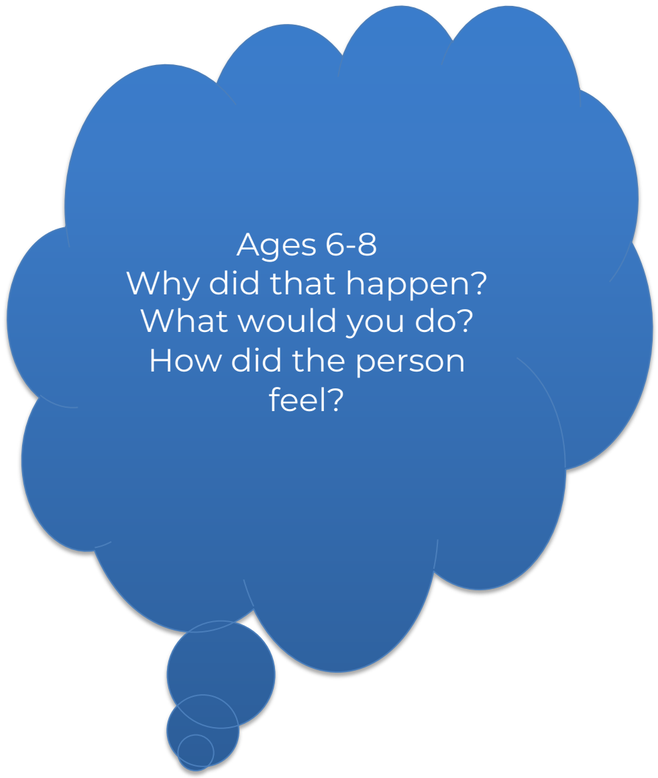
Step Three – Ages 11+
Abstract Thinking
Using symbolism, ethics, and theology

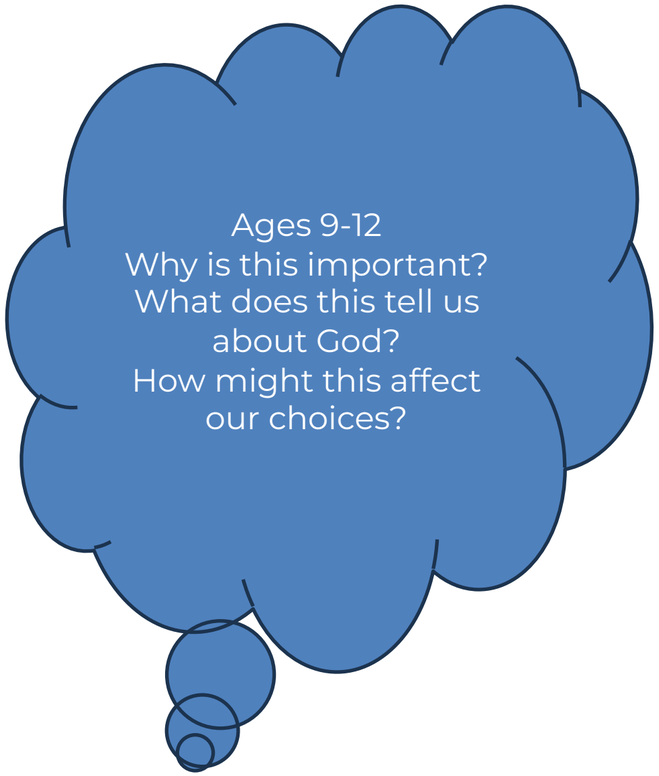
Ask them, "What does it mean to be the Light of the World?"

Applying to Sermons

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Attention-Span and Engagement

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Get creative by using...

Visuals

Movement

Stories

Hands-on objects

Music

Questions





Neurodiversity and Disabilities

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Understanding Neurodivergence

Neurodiversity – every person has a brain that functions in a way that is uniquely their own. It includes neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals.

Neurodivergent – an individual that has a mind that functions in a way that differs from the societally defined norm in ways that are either genetic, acquired, or innate.

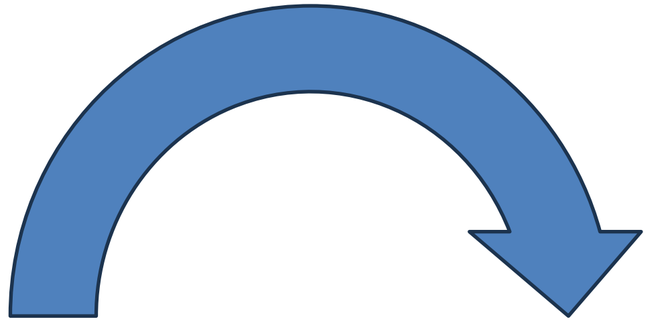


Neurotypical – an individual that has a mind that functions within the societally defined norm.

Sensory Tool House

2025 Sensory Tool House, LLC

Different, NOT Less.



Shifting from, *"What's wrong with this child?"* to **"What support does this child need to participate?"**

Promoting Inclusion

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1. **Belonging**
Every child is welcomed.

2. **Representation**
Children see people like themselves.



3. **Accessibility**
Multiple ways to participate.

4. **Relationships**
Adults intentionally connect with children.

Every Child Deserves Belonging

- **Development varies**
- **Children learn differently**
- **Neurodiversity is part of human diversity**
- **Small changes create meaningful inclusion**
- **Churches can be places where every child experiences God’s love**



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Thank You

Questions or follow-up - we'd love to connect.

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